**Slave narrative of Annie L. Burton, “Memories of Childhood’s Slavery Days,” Boston. (1909)**

**From *Six Women’s Slave Narratives* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1988), pp. 9–12.**

*Annie Burton was born in Alabama in 1858, three years before the outbreak of the Civil War. Her mother had run away, but she returned to the plantation after the war. Annie later moved to Boston, where she married and published her memoir in 1909. She also composed a biography of Abraham Lincoln. Her story, a part of which is excerpted below, offers the unique perspective of a slave child who experienced the war without fully understanding all of its implications.*

One day my master heard that the Yankees were coming our way, and he immediately made preparations to get his goods and valuables out of their reach. The big six-mule team was brought to the smoke-house door, and loaded with hams and provisions. After being loaded, the team was put in the care of two of the most trustworthy and valuable slaves that my master owned, and driven away. It was master’s intention to have these things taken to a swamp, and there concealed in a pit that had recently been made for the purpose. But just before the team left the main road for the by-road that led to the swamp, the two slaves were surprised by the Yankees, who at once took possession of the provisions, and started the team toward Clayton, where the Yankees had headquarters. The road to Clayton ran past our plantation. One of the slave children happened to look up the road, and saw the Yankees coming, and gave warning. Whereupon, my master left unceremoniously for the woods, and remained concealed there for five days. The niggers had run away whenever they got a chance, but now it was master’s and the other white folks’ turn to run.

The Yankees rode up to the piazza of the great house and inquired who owned the plantation. They gave orders that nothing must be touched or taken away, as they intended to return shortly and take possession. My mistress and the slaves watched for their return day and night for more than a week, but the Yankees did not come back.

One morning in April, 1865, my master got the news that the Yankees had left Mobile Bay and crossed the Confederate lines, and that the Emancipation Proclamation had been signed by President Lincoln. Mistress suggested that the slaves should not be told of their freedom; but master said he would tell them, because they would soon find it out, even if he did not tell them. Mistress, however, said she could keep my mother’s three children, for my mother had now been gone so long.

All the slaves left the plantation upon the news of their freedom, except those who were feeble or sickly. With the help of these, the crops were gathered. My mistress and her daughters had to go to the kitchen and to the washtub. My little half-brother, Henry, and myself had to gather chips, and help all we could. My sister, Caroline, who was twelve years old, could help in the kitchen.

After the war, the Yankees took all the good mules and horses from the plantation, and left their old army stock. We children chanced to come across one of the Yankees’ old horses, that had “U. S.” branded on him. We called him “Old Yank” and got him fattened up. One day in August, six of us children took “Old Yank” and went away back on the plantation for watermelons. Coming home, we thought we would make the old horse trot. When “Old Yank” commenced to trot, our big melons dropped off, but we couldn’t stop the horse for some time. Finally, one of the big boys went back and got some more melons, and left us eating what we could find of the ones that had been dropped. Then all we six, with our melons, got on “Old Yank” and went home. We also used to hitch “Old Yank” into a wagon and get wood. But one sad day in the fall, the Yankees came back again, and gathered up their old stock, and took “Old Yank” away.

One day mistress sent me out to do some churning under a tree. I went to sleep and jerked the churn over on top of me, and consequently got a whipping.

My mother came for us at the end of the year 1865, and demanded that her children be given up to her. This, mistress refused to do, and threatened to set the dogs on my mother if she did not at once leave the place. My mother went away, and remained with some of the neighbors until supper time. Then she got a boy to tell Caroline to come down to the fence. When she came, my mother told her to go back and get Henry and myself and bring us down to the gap in the fence as quick as she could. Then my mother took Henry in her arms, and my sister carried me on her back. We climbed fences and crossed fields, and after several hours came to a little hut which my mother had secured on a plantation. We had no more than reached the place, and made a little fire, when master’s two sons rode up and demanded that the children be returned. My mother refused to give us up. Upon her offering to go with them to the Yankee headquarters to find out if it were really true that all negroes had been made free, the young men left, and troubled us no more.

**Document Analysis**

1. Annie states that her master and mistress did not hear of the Emancipation Proclamation until April 1865. What had kept the news from them for so long?
2. Why was the mistress so intent on keeping Annie and her siblings, even after her mother came back to claim them? Was this behavior legal?